

TRIBUTE TO THE SOLLEFTEA, SWEDEN/MADISON, MISSISSIPPI SISTER-CITY RELATIONSHIP

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the sister-city relationship between the City of Solleftea, Sweden and the City of Madison, Mississippi. This international partnership has provided opportunities for cultural and business exchanges, as well as providing Swedish and American citizens unique experiences to broaden cultural perspectives.

The Sister-City Program was inaugurated by United States President Dwight David Eisenhower in 1956. This business and cultural exchange was chartered to foster greater friendship and understanding between the people of the United States and other countries through the medium of direct personal contact. Since its inception, over 1,200 American state and local governments have joined with 2,100 foreign partners to create a network of international friendship.

The citizens of Solleftea and Madison have expressed their willingness and desire, through their respective councils, to become sister-cities and to adhere to the ideals set forth by President Eisenhower. These two cities also wish to encourage cultural exchanges that will lead to a lasting friendship between the communities.

The sister-cities agreement was signed by Solleftea and Madison on June 27, 1997 in Sweden. Since this time, three Swedish companies have opened or plan to open businesses in the City of Madison. Hagloff, Inc., Minitube and Logosol are three Swedish companies that should be commended for their efforts to further the spirit of the June 1997 compact.

The Solleftea and Madison friendship has served as a model for future sister-city partnerships. I commend the efforts of these two great cities and wish them continued success in the future.

AMTRAK

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I am concerned about Amtrak's future. Though Congress has worked to ensure its continued existence, the Administration has yet to fulfill its statutory responsibilities which are necessary if Amtrak is to have any hope of turning into a viable operation.

As my colleagues well know, the Senate has invested countless hours during the past several Congresses to enact legislation that would enable Amtrak to reinvent itself, both operationally and financially. After three long years, Congress achieved a bipartisan reform package that was signed into law by the President on December 2, 1997.

This package, the Amtrak Reform and Accountability Act, was touted as Amtrak's "last chance." It provided significant changes, allowing Amtrak to operate more like a business. Congress expected Amtrak to immediately

begin implementing the many reform provisions. Certain responsibilities concerning Amtrak's future were assumed by Amtrak's union and management employees, the American taxpayers, Congress and the Administration.

For their part, Amtrak's employees agreed to negotiate employee benefits just like other segments of industry in exchange for financial security. The taxpayers contributed considerably—\$2 billion for capital improvements in addition to the \$22 billion already given to Amtrak to date.

Congress fulfilled its part of the deal, too. The Congress appointed its members to the newly created Amtrak Reform Board. Further, the Senate recently adopted a provision in the budget resolution urging full funding for Amtrak to enable it to reach its goal of zero operating assistance by 2003.

Who is missing from this effort? Mr. President, I content it is the Administration.

In the past months, the Administration has missed numerous deadlines and issued contrary proposals.

First, the law requires the Department of Transportation (DOT) Inspector General to begin an independent audit of Amtrak's financial situation. The audit was supposed to begin within a month of enactment, which would have been this past January. The DOT Inspector General has worked to abide by the statute, but the Secretary of DOT has refused to allow the audit to go forward. DOT's refusal prompted both the House and Senate Appropriations Committee to provide specific funding to cover the audit's expense. DOT knows that funding is on its way, yet the Secretary has refused to permit the IG to begin the process.

Second, the law required the President to nominate a new 7-member Reform Board to replace Amtrak's current Board of Directors. Since the reform package required Amtrak to operate like a business. Congress and the Administration agreed that new leadership was imperative. After all, instilling a 'new culture' among Amtrak employees and management necessitated that changes start from the top.

The law requires the Reform Board to be in place by March 31, 1998—almost 1 month ago—yet we still have not received a single nomination from the President. Most troublesome is the fact that if the new Reform Board has not assumed the responsibilities of the Amtrak Board of Directors before July 1st, Amtrak's authorization lapses. I do not think the Administration would want this to happen.

Mr. President, in addition to the Administration's recent shortcomings, it has also failed to announce the names of individuals who will fill the Administration's three slots on the Amtrak Reform Council. Because the Council is expected to play a critical role in formulating passenger rail in the years ahead, I have encouraged the 8 members appointed by the Congress to

begin their work. I understand the first meeting of the Council should occur in early May.

The only action taken by the Administration thus far has been to propose a budget that underfunds Amtrak in fiscal year 1999. The Administration's budget submission seeks to take money away from capital expenditures and to use it to pay for Amtrak salaries and operating expenses. This diversion proposal is in direct violation of the statutory language in the law which established the capital funding subsidy.

Ms. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I share the Majority Leader's concerns about Amtrak. As the primary author of the Amtrak reform law, I am very concerned that Amtrak has yet to have the opportunity to avail itself of the statutory reforms we all worked so hard to provide. The Amtrak Reform Council positions are an essential element in the overall reform scheme.

Amtrak needs to make long-term plans and commitments. That action has not yet begun. I hope the Administration will take prompt action to fulfill its responsibilities and give Amtrak the opportunity to achieve what we all hope is possible—a fiscally sound and efficient national rail passenger system.

Mr. MCCAIN. My colleagues know all too well my frustrations with Amtrak. However, I worked in good faith with my colleagues and the Administration to move the Amtrak reform legislation through the legislative process. Therefore, I expected similar "good faith" to be applied in fulfilling the statutory provisions under the Act.

I find it unconscionable the Administration continues to obstruct the independent assessment. This is one of the most critical elements in the entire reform package. How can anyone determine if Amtrak is meeting its financial obligations if we don't have a baseline to start? What is it about Amtrak's finances the Administration is trying to keep covered up?

Equally troubling to me is the Administration's lack of regard for upholding the statute. A new Reform Board was to be in place nearly a month ago. These positions require Senate confirmation which necessitates hearings and review by the Commerce Committee. I have every intention to uphold our Committee's responsibilities. Yet, we have not received even ONE nomination from the President.

Worse still, the rumors we hear is that the Administration is considering reappointing current Board members. I have been very clear, that the Commerce Committee will not report favorably any Board hold-overs and I stand firm on that position. I would think even the Administration would acknowledge we didn't create a new Board only to reappoint the same members.

Why isn't the Administration interested in fixing Amtrak's problems while it is under their watch? I never cease to be amazed.